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### Budget Process Continues

Ellis County Commissioners took the next step in the annual budget process during their regularly-scheduled meeting on Monday, August 22, by taking a record vote regarding the tax rate for fiscal year 2011-2012.

“I make a motion to discuss the tax rate for budget Fiscal Year 2011-2012 and to place the proposal to adopt the rate of .413599 on September 26, 2011, a regularly scheduled meeting of the Ellis County Commissioners’ Court,” said Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2.

The motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3, had the effect of setting a ceiling for the tax rate that can be considered by the Court in its September 26 meeting.

“If the Court passes the motion made by Dodson, there will not be a tax rate this year higher than .413599,” said County Auditor Mike Navarro.

Navarro told the Court that County Judge Carol Bush would present a budget that could be funded by that tax rate.

“It is a budget that avoids cutting infrastructure and allocates an additional \$300,000 for road budgets in the next year,” Navarro said. “It would also avoid cutting law enforcement. When we talked early on about making cuts, you pointed out that your priorities were law enforcement and road and bridge.”

Navarro noted that approximately eight or nine jobs would still be lost in other departments.

“We started this a few years ago,” said Bush. “Some of the positions were lost through attrition, we tried consolidating some departments – we’ve done that two years in a row, and now we are anticipating eight to nine more cuts.”

Navarro added that the proposed budget, which can be funded by the proposed tax rate, passes along the rise in dependent insurance coverage, sets aside half a million dollars that will be spent due to a law suit against the Appraisal District, leverages federal dollars for flood control, and provides for infrastructure contracts already approved by the Court.

“It includes no across-the-board pay raises once again,” he said. “It also cuts our payments for indigent defense by \$350,000.”

He reminded the Court that in the last two budget years the County has reduced its retirement match, decreased employee benefits, and cut staff in the engineering office, the extension office, and the law library.

“We are trying to do what we can to limit the size of government – that’s what we are putting before you,” Navarro concluded.

“It’s a very difficult decision to entertain; however, when you consider what we have done so far, when you consider what is critical to the public -- they have an expectation that if they call 9-1-1, dispatch is going to answer and dispatch is going to send someone,” said Bush. “People also expect that they are going to be able to drive on the roads. We are trying to meet those expectations with limited funds. I do not want to see our safety compromised or for us to get behind in maintaining or developing new infrastructure so that we become penny wise and pound foolish.”

Under the Texas Tax Code, members of the Court were required to vote individually on Dodson’s motion; each member of the Court voted yes, while at the same time encouraging Bush to bring back a budget that can be funded by the lowest possible rate.

Two public hearings are required before the tax rate can be finalized. Those hearings will be held on September 12 at 10 a.m. and on September 21 at 10 a.m.

A public hearing regarding the proposed budget will also be held during the same meeting on September 21. All the meetings are slated for the Commissioners’ Courtroom in the Historic Courthouse in downtown Waxahachie.

Commissioners also approved the salaries, expenses and allowances of elected officials for fiscal year 2011-2012 during Monday’s meeting. There were no changes in the figures from the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

Special Projects Director Kathy Eriksen updated the members of the court on the status of the County’s redistricting process, including information regarding the status of the plan’s synchronization with the Ennis Ward Lines.

“We ran into a problem with the Ward Lines in Ennis, so rather than have the rest of the County delayed, Professor Morrison recommended we go forward with the rest and not submit Ennis,” Eriksen said. “That would give Ennis time if they chose to redraw their Ward Lines.”

Eriksen said the deadline for submitting the Ennis portion of the plan to the Justice Department is October 31.

Having no indication that the City of Ennis would decide to redraw its Ward Lines, Commissioners said that they preferred to submit the entire plan at one time.

“If there are issues, those can be dealt with later,” said Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1.

No action was called for on the discussion-only item. The completed plan will be brought back before the Court for final approval at a later date.

No action was taken on a request for a tax abatement between Ellis County and Triumph Vought Aerostructures, LLC for a 240,000 square foot industrial and manufacturing facility in Red Oak. A special meeting has been posted for Thursday, August 25, at 5:30 p.m. at which time the Court is expected to discuss its tax abatement guidelines and take action on the proposed abatement.

The Court did, however, hear from representatives of Triumph Vought as well as the Mayor of Red Oak, Alan Hugley.

“I want to let you know that this opportunity came up beginning about five weeks ago – so we’ve had to take a process that normally, comfortably, might have taken two, three, four months, and condense it,” Hugley said. “The reason this opportunity exists is because we have what I can

only call the human infrastructure – the ability to move quickly, to move together. The cooperation on this has been remarkable.”

Newt Newton of Triumph Vought, who said he has been with the company since 1967, told the Court the facility will make wings for a new high-end private aircraft.

“In the first year, we will provide only six,” Newton said. “Every new aircraft has a fly-and-see-if-you-can-break-it period before they let the general public buy it. After that, we will go into serial production and build up to 77 per year.”

Newton estimated 65 to 75 engineers on staff in the first three years, reducing after the testing period, with technicians at about 140 in the first three years, increasing to as many as 275 by the time production is fully implemented. The company plans to contract for many services, such as maintenance and janitorial.

“It is the goal of the Court to stimulate the local economy however possible, and that does mean looking for businesses such as your own,” Bush said.

Commissioners took time out during the meeting to recognize retiring Department of Development Director Delton Ake for his over 11 years of service with Ellis County.

“Thank you for the years you’ve allowed me to work,” Ake said. “I’ve enjoyed most of it!”  
In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved a replat for Sunset Meadows, Phase I, in precinct 3;
- Entered into a cooperative purchasing agreement with the City of Plano for internet auctioning services with Rene Bates Auctioneer, pursuant to an interlocal agreement approved in 2005;
- Approved a Participation Agreement with JPMorgan Chase to provide credit card services under a Cooperative Purchasing Agreement with the City of Fort Worth, contingent upon legal review;
- Approved a Joint Elections Agreement and Contract for Services for the City of Glenn Heights and Buena Vista Bethel Special Utility District for the November 8, 2011 Election;
- Approved a contract with the North Central Texas Council of Governments for the Cities Readiness Initiative running August 1, 2011 through July 31, 2012;
- Authorized the County Judge to sign an interagency agreement with Tarleton State University for the Rural Law Enforcement Initiative;
- Authorized the County Judge to sign an interagency agreement with the NCTCOG for the Rural Law Enforcement Initiative Analysis Portal;
- Approved a contract with the Garratt Callahan Company to provide chemical treatment services for the new air conditioner units on the Wayne McCollum Detention Center;
- Approved an interlocal agreement with NCTCOG for E9-1-1 Service, Equipment, Addressing and Database Maintenance effective September 1, 2011 through August 31, 2013;
- Approved the 2011-2012 payroll and holiday schedules;
- Approved the 2011-2012 Commissioners’ Court meeting schedule.